



CANARI POLICY BRIEF No.16

Are we there yet? Using participatory monitoring and evaluation to assess real results in the Caribbean

2014

Civil Society and Governance

Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is too often seen as a separate activity that must be done to satisfy the demands of donors rather than an integral part of designing a project to achieve real results that matter. It is often done by external "experts" and using language and methods that are confusing and unhelpful to the stakeholders involved in understanding what is being achieved by the project or programme. This needs to change and the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) has been experimenting with methods and approaches to facilitating participatory M&E. The Institute has developed an M&E Strategy and tested this in the design of its Strategic Plan 2011-2016 as well as in plans and evaluation activities for individual programmes and projects (see Boxes 1 and 2 for examples). Early lessons are exciting and point to the usefulness of using innovative and participatory methodologies to improve how M&E is done and how the findings can be more reflective of reality and relevant to shaping how sustainable development initiatives are implemented in the Caribbean. M&E is a cornerstone competency that civil society and their partners need to embrace and utilise in their programmes, plans and projects in order to increase the impact of their work in the region.

Key messages

- **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential to assess the results of a project, lessons learnt, and to identify recommendations for adaptive management.**
- **Participatory approaches to M&E ensure that diverse perspectives from target audiences and partners in the project or programme are captured.**
- **Participatory approaches to M&E ensure that there is buy-in to the findings and implementation of adaptive management actions recommended.**
- **Innovative cost-effective methods can be used in participatory M&E.**

Aiming for accountability and learning

The overall aim of M&E is to collect, manage and use information to guide management and decision-making. As part of this, there are two main purposes for doing M&E: accountability and learning.

Accountability is important to demonstrate results at three different levels:

- a) Upward accountability towards the donor and relevant authorities
- b) Horizontal accountability towards the various stakeholders involved in implementing the project/programme, within and external to the implementing organisation
- c) Downward accountability towards the stakeholders being targeted

Box 1: Mid-term evaluation of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Caribbean Islands Programme

The CEPF Caribbean Islands Programme is a 5 year US\$6.9 million grant fund to support civil society's contribution to biodiversity conservation in eleven Caribbean islands. A mid-term evaluation of the CEPF Caribbean islands programme was conducted in 2013 by CANARI, in its role as the Regional Implementation Team (RIT).

A framework was developed to guide the assessment of relevance, results, efficiency and effectiveness of the process, and sustainability. The evaluation included: a desk review of reports prepared by the RIT and CEPF Secretariat; three national focus group sessions held with grantees, key partners, and members of the Regional Advisory Committee for CEPF (RACC) in Haiti, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic; an online survey; interviews with grantees and RACC members; a regional workshop with grantees, RACC members, donors, government partners, the CEPF Secretariat and the RIT; and a focus group session with RIT staff.

Stakeholders engaged in the participatory evaluation found the process extremely useful for them to be able to collectively share and analyse ideas and were particularly interested in some of the innovative methodologies used, for example outcome mapping.

Results of the participatory evaluation are presented in a report. In summary:

- a) Overwhelmingly, stakeholders felt that the CEPF Caribbean islands programme was very relevant in addressing the needs, expectations and capacities of Caribbean stakeholders, particularly in supporting strengthening of civil society, networking, biodiversity conservation action on priorities, complementing other initiatives, and building knowledge about biodiversity.
- b) Stakeholders also felt that the CEPF Caribbean islands programme is making excellent progress with the portfolio and achieving strong results against the priorities and targets identified in the Ecosystem Profile.
- c) The participatory evaluation also successfully analysed what results were being seen in terms of the contribution by CEPF to changes in behaviour and relationships of Caribbean civil society organisations (CSOs) and donors using the outcome mapping approach.
- d) Stakeholders identified several "most significant changes", some of which were directly aligned to the desired objectives of CEPF but some of which went beyond this framework. For example, stakeholders felt that CEPF supported innovative approaches to



Figure 1: Participants at the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) mid-term evaluation workshop held in July 2013 in Kingston, Jamaica (Source CANARI)

conservation and a rigorous regional Caribbean-owned approach.

- e) Stakeholders felt that the processes used by the CEPF Caribbean islands programme were generally effective, and in some cases very effective. However, many critical recommendations were made for improving administrative processes, especially in terms of the application process and also for enhancing monitoring and reporting.

- f) Stakeholders gave recommendations to help ensure that the results of the CEPF Caribbean islands programme are likely to remain sustained beyond the end of the project and also identified priorities for future CEPF investments to achieve conservation results.

The RIT consolidated the recommendations made by stakeholders for improving the CEPF Caribbean islands programme and several positive changes were put in place to increase the conservation impacts that the programme has by its end in September, 2015.

Learning is important to systematically assess what lessons are being learnt in order to increase knowledge and understanding to: improve planning/management for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness; assess potential for replication; and build organisational capacity.

However, finding a balance between these two objectives is sometimes difficult as demonstrating results while also being open to learning from mistakes can be perceived to be in conflict.

What do we need to evaluate?

M&E needs to address four key areas:

- a. **Relevance:** To what extent is the project/programme that was conceived and the activities that were planned, consistent with the needs, expectations and capacities of the various stakeholders? Has the project/ programme responded adequately to identified needs, goals and objectives?
- b. **Results:** What are the measurable (quantitative and qualitative) outputs (products, goods, services, capacities, etc.) directly produced as a result of the project/programme? What are the outcomes (the likely short- or medium-term effects of the outputs of a project/programme) and impacts (the long-term changes in the environment, economy or society that the project/programme contribute to)? Results can be expected or unexpected and positive or negative.
- c. **Efficiency and effectiveness:** To what extent have activities been executed as planned and have produced the desired outputs? To what extent have activities been implemented with the optimal use of finan-

cial, human and technical resources and in a timely fashion, and using suitable project management arrangements?

- d. **Sustainability:** To what extent have the outcomes and outputs been, and are likely to remain, sustained beyond the timeframe of the project/programme and its various activities? What are the requirements for future activities that can help build such sustainability?

Frameworks for M&E

There are various analytical models that can be used in planning, monitoring and evaluation. The Logical Framework approach is widely used and still mandated by many donors. Another is Outcome Mapping. CANARI uses a combined approach to draw on the strengths of each of these approaches.

Logical Framework or Logframe analysis emphasises logical planning about what a project is trying to achieve (the purpose or goal), what things the project needs to do to bring that about (the outputs) and what needs to be done to produce these outputs (the activities). It also looks at the potential problems that could affect the success of the project and how the progress and ultimate success of the project will be measured and verified.

Outcome Mapping is an alternative model that shifts away from a focus on impact as a change in state to outcome as change in behaviours, relationships, actions or activities of the people, groups and organisations with which a development programme works directly. It is based on the central concept that development is by and for people, and thus seeks to measure change in people. Outcome mapping identifies the key groups

Box 2: Participatory development of a plan to evaluate CANARI's Rural Livelihoods programme



Figure 2: Non-timber forest products made in Trinidad by rural communities groups (Source CANARI)

CANARI is using a combined logical framework and outcome mapping approach to evaluating work under its projects and programmes. A plan was developed for the Rural Livelihoods programme that outlines how desired results for the programme as defined in CANARI's Strategic Plan 2011-2016 will be achieved.

The plan identifies target groups, including:

- a) Individuals and groups in rural communities in the Caribbean that are interested in establishing and developing small businesses based on the sustainable use of natural resources.
- b) Technical and financial agencies that provide skill development, financial and material support to individuals and groups in rural communities conducting natural resources based small businesses in the Caribbean.

A second workshop was held to facilitate a participatory evaluation of progress made to achieve these results by a project funded by the J.B. Fernandes Memorial Trust I. The evaluation was able to identify what results had already been achieved and where more work was needed.

Using the combined logical framework and outcome mapping approach gave CANARI insights on key steps needed to achieve real results within the programme. For example, both target groups agreed that in order for rural community groups to establish and maintain small businesses, it would be critical for the groups to first spend time investing in organisational capacity building to ensure they had leadership, good governance and strong financial management systems in place.

that need to change to achieve the desired results, describes the change needed, and maps out the graduated series of change in behaviours towards this ultimate vision of success.

CANARI also uses the **Most Significant Change** technique. This is a form of participatory M&E that involves the collection of significant change stories from people and

the systematic selection of the most noteworthy of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. Open questioning allows stakeholders to think outside of what the project/programme has defined in order to talk about the results that are really important to them. This is very useful in capturing unexpected or unplanned positive and negative results.

Why participatory M&E?

Participatory M&E involves stakeholders in collaboratively deciding what is important to measure, how to measure it, how to assess the results and finally, how to identify and make changes which will improve performance. It shares control amongst stakeholders and shifts the focus from top down monitoring and bottom up accountability to mutual accountability and mutual learning. This contrasts with conventional monitoring and evaluation which generally involves outside "experts" measuring performance against pre-set indicators using standardised procedures and tools. The advantages of participatory M&E are:

- **enhanced capacity of stakeholders** including through increased knowledge, skills and positive attitudes and values;
- **empowerment of stakeholders** as they have space to include their perspectives, analyse their views and advocate for action;
- **strengthened partnerships** through involvement of all stakeholders, increased mutual understanding, collaboration in the process and opportunities to celebrate success;
- **increased accountability** to stakeholders through increased demands for information and transparency.

Methods and tools in participatory M&E

There are a wide variety of tools that can be used in M&E depending on the competencies of the persons doing the evaluation, the resources and time available to do activities, the data and information available, and who needs to be engaged. While there are extremely rigorous methods (for example using sophisticated sampling, social surveys, mapping and biophysical monitoring), CANARI uses a combination of innovative and low-cost methods that capture both quantitative as well as qualitative information, allowing stakeholders to effectively input into the process and facilitating probing for deeper understanding and learning. Methods have included:

- Desk reviews of written plans, reports and other key documents.
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, both face-to-face and via the telephone and virtual communication (e.g. Skype), to collect information while still enabling open discussion and probing to

identify unexpected results and lessons

- Participatory video to facilitate collective analysis and enable participants to communicate their ideas in their own voice without interpretation or summary by the evaluator
- Surveys administered face-to-face as well as using email and online tools (e.g. Survey Monkey)
- Using social media (e.g. Facebook) particularly to assess Most Significant Change
- Focus groups and workshops to facilitate collective analysis and sharing

What you can do

1. **Include participatory M&E as an essential component of the design of programmes, plans and projects.** The project document or proposal should outline who will be involved, what methods you will use, and what activities you will conduct. A separate M&E plan or framework can be developed to outline more specifics including a workplan and budget.
2. **Engage all key stakeholders in the M&E process.** Stakeholder identification and analysis should be done early in the project, and the key stakeholders identified then. They will have different insights and experiences and be able to contribute different perspectives to get a richer and more accurate picture of what results are being achieved and how the process can be improved.
3. **Use diverse methods to effectively reach all participants in the evaluation.** Engaging diverse stakeholders, from grassroots community members to technocrats and policymakers in government, will mean that diverse methods need to be used. Virtual tools (such as online surveys, emails, and online meeting facilities) can be useful to reach audiences in other countries that may not be able to participate in face-to-face interactions.
4. **Think about results as both change in state (such as development of policies and plans, implementation of conservation initiatives, improvements to livelihoods) as well as changes in behaviour of the key people who need to drive the change.** Although the dominant approach to M&E is using a logical framework (i.e. what change in state do you want to achieve), it is very useful to also think about how the change can happen and who you need to target to make the change happen (i.e. using an outcome mapping approach). This can

guide what project activities you need to implement and help you to focus on achieving results rather than merely implementing activities and completing deliverables.

5. **Communicate key findings of an evaluation back to stakeholders so that they are clear on what results are being achieved and what needs to be done to continue to achieve positive and sustainable results.** This communication must be in ways that are meaningful to different audiences. Long and complex evaluation reports are not as useful as summary reports for technical audiences, popular articles and media reports, policy briefs, learning journals or videos.

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for over 20 years.

Our mission is to promote and facilitate equitable participation and effective collaboration in the management of natural resources critical to development in the Caribbean islands, so that people will have a better quality of life and natural resources will be conserved, through action learning and research, capacity building and fostering partnerships.

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